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OPENING TO SELF THROUGH MUSIC

by Gregory Carroll, PhD

Gregory Carroll, PhD, has been on the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro School of Music since 1981. He is a founding member of The Monroe Institute's Professional Division and a member of our Board of Advisors. Dr. Carroll gives yearly presentations on music, health, and healing at the North Carolina Center for Advancement of Teaching and has received the School of Music's outstanding teaching award. These qualifications made him the logical choice to conduct an intensive workshop as part of UNCG's Division of Continual Learning Summer Shorts program.

On July 25, 2001, I presented a one-day workshop with the underlying premise that in discovering our Self—the core of our being-ness that is covered over by our life experiences—we can come to know and fully embrace Who We Are and, thereby, be of greater assistance to others. Music is only one tool for achieving health and wholeness. These two words arise from common linguistic roots, and we use musical metaphors to describe the states they denote: “Are we making a sound decision?” or “Let’s work toward harmony in the family.” Music can assist with the healthy catharsis and processing of our feelings. Opening to yourself means, simply, the unconditional acceptance of who you are at this moment. Your experiences will be unique—just as you are. You need not study music to understand it; it is a self-teaching language.

Most compositions express contrasting emotional states. Duality and polarity are aspects of Earth Life reality, but not of spiritual reality. Quantum physicists remind us that it is better to speak in terms of “relationship” rather than “cause and effect.” Consciously or not, composers create “whole” works that integrate polarities.

Baroque and Classical music can energize us and support clarity of thought. Baroque compositions stimulate the mind and brain on many levels and in many areas. Baroque’s regular beat can even alter the rate of the human heartbeat. Classical pieces avoid extremes of emotional intensity and clarify our thinking. It is almost as if their structural organization influences the brain to respond in a particular fashion.

We have become alienated from “nature” in the expression “human nature.” And we have come to treat our natural environment as an object. Nineteenth-century music uses sound to evoke vivid imagery and activate our capacity to visualize—to create an internal three-dimensional world through our “mind’s eye.”

Great teachers tell us that how we respond to events is even more important than what happens. Pain simply IS, and both psychological and emotional pain can trigger personal transformation. During crisis, some compositions enable us to air out pain, anger, and grief, while others help us find release and give us strength and courage to continue.

The world we live in demands our attention. It continually drags us back to an external focus, and we tend to lose ourselves in the shuffle. While we are actively engaged in the outside world, we put feelings and emotions “on hold” because we cannot pause to “metabolize” them. Many musical pieces—METAMUSIC especially—strengthen our inner focus and “set the stage” for the meditative process of inner exploration.

Music, at its most powerful, inspires us to “give over” to the Universe, a faith, or a Higher Power. When that happens, we begin to see and live life differently, and the Present consumes our awareness. Surrendering to Life opens the way for growth and personal transformation. The vitality of spiritual development on the planet at this time is based on the idea that an individual’s life is a microcosm of evolution for all. Personal transformation becomes a benchmark for everyone’s consciousness development. This concept, which is a very recent thing, urges us to “live through our hearts” in whatever we may do.

Postscript

The following laudatory comments from participants indicate that Dr. Carroll got his points across. “Beautifully planned. Opening to Pain, Anger, and Grief was exquisite. Dr. Carroll’s stories and the music were beautifully intertwined.” “Dr. Carroll has an infinite passion for all that music exemplifies and encompasses in human reality and communicates it well.” And “This was one of the most ‘morally encouraging’ programs I have attended. What a delight to embrace the good (often coming from the bad).”

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